

Participatory Cellphilmaking as a New Pedagogy for Diversity

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Introduction

Ethnography is a major research method employed in not only the field of anthropology but also other academic disciplines. It is now regarded as qualitative research, but it has functioned as a “scientific” mode of inquiry in the West—scientific enough to “... produce knowledge about strange and foreign worlds” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 1). Due to the rise of Cartesian knowledge and its emphasis on science as a rigid, reliable method depicting “Reality” and thereby constructing “Knowledge” and the “Truth,” anthropologists in the early twentieth century appreciated “scientific” ethnography. In such scientific ethnography, “race” was a powerful tool for objectifying people in the “non-West” and classifying them as “savages,” “the primitive,” and “the exotic” (e.g., Boas, 1938; Malinowski, 1985).

With the emergence of new theoretical frameworks such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism, scholars started to use a video camera as a means to deconstruct the unbalanced power structure between ethnographers and people to be observed. Their works challenge the Western norm gauging ethnographic films by ethnographers including Flaherty, Mead, and Bateson as the Canon. Moreover, taking account of the issues evident in scientific ethnography, some researchers have produced films in order to create counter-knowledge(s) reflecting diversity among people and cultures.

For instance, *cinéma vérité*, the ethnographic film genre invented in France between 1960s and 70s, attached importance to considering the positionality of filmmakers. The ethnographic filmmakers of *cinéma vérité* such as Rouch (1961) took notice of their status possessing power to film and its impact on film production and the relationship with their participants. In short, they became aware of their subjectivity, as illustrated by Lynn and Lea (2005): “Where *we* [ethnographers] position that image in relation to the picture edge, what size it will be, what orientation it will take are *our* decisions. These are determined by *our own* preferences, tastes and mood ...”

(p. 221; original emphasis).

These alternative film practices accelerated the further examination of the inter-relationship between filmmakers and their participants, and led to the advent of participatory filmmaking. In addition to carrying out interviews in the field, Kindon (2003) applies a visual method in her feminist geography research, which involves filming and editing in partnership with the Maaori research participants. Similarly, Flores (2004) is engaged in producing a film in cooperation with the members of the indigenous communities in Guatemala. Both Kindon and Flores argue that studies accompanied by participatory filmmaking cause changes in the mindset of researchers, participants, and viewers, and thereby bring about a social transformation. According to Ledwith and Springett (2010), the transformation as such is achievable because participatory research projects enable "... practitioners not only to explore the world, but also to examine the lens through which they perceive the world, and in so doing local practice begins to be seen within bigger social issues" (p. 19).

On the contrary, in the context of Japan, the significance of research employing participatory filmmaking has been overlooked. From this research gap arise the following guiding questions: What is it like to practice participatory filmmaking in Japan, in particular, the university classroom? What sort of diversity can be shown in a film resulting from collaboration? What possibilities does participatory filmmaking have as a pedagogy? Focusing on a film created in collaboration with university students in Kumamoto, this article discusses the process and the outcome of the participatory film project, and aims to propose a model of participatory filmmaking that can be adopted in Japanese higher education.

Conceptual Framework

The notion of the "third space" discussed by Trinh (1994) is helpful in conceptualizing this study and examining the questions raised above. Trinh delineates the possibility of the third space transgressing the dichotomy of the first and the second spaces:

Here, Third is not merely derivative of First and Second. It is a space of its own. Such a space allows for the emergence of new subjectivities that resist letting themselves be settled in the movement across First and Second. Third is thus formed by the process of hybridization which, rather than simply adding a here to a there, gives rise to an elsewhere-within-here/-there that appears both too recognizable and impossible to contain.

(1994, pp. 18-19)

As shown above, in the third space, simple classification can no longer be applied. In other words, the third space allows diverse actors to coexist and go beyond the existing national, cultural, ethnic, and language borders and dichotomies. Drawing on Trinh's concept as such, I consider the classroom where educators and learners as well as filmmakers and viewers from various backgrounds gather and interact as a site of potential educational change.

Through the case of the produced film, I intend to show how the third space emerges from participatory filmmaking in the classroom. For that, it is essential to pay attention to its process. Thomas and Britton (2012) articulate the unique feature of participatory film practice:

As a facilitated process, participatory video has managed to distinguish itself from other filmmaking projects by focusing on the process of making a film rather than the film itself. It has been argued that in using video as a tool for social change, the emphasis should be put on the process of media making, rather than the actual end product (p. 214)

Hence, this article attaches importance to describing the process of the collaborative film project, that is, how it was launched and developed. By doing so, I seek to show how participatory filmmaking can be employed as a pedagogy in other higher educational institutions in Japan.

Methodology

Participatory filmmaking in this study is inspired by the practice of cellphilm-ing. It is an emerging visual research method applied by scholars (e.g., MacEntee, Burkholder, & Schwab-Cartas, 2016; Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2016; Schwab-Cartas, 2018). A "cellphilm" is a newly coined term integrating "cellphone" and "film," which means a film created with a cellphone. The popularization of cellphones enables many people to take pictures and videos and present their works online easily. Young people in Japan are no exception to it.

Studies have been done to demonstrate the contribution of cellphilm to the realm of education. For instance, Mitchell, De Lange, and Moletsane (2016) suggest that the practice of cellphilm gives autonomy to cellphilm-makers: "Because special equipment is not required, there may be more possibilities for creative expres-

sion in ways that are not always researcher-led or, in the case of youth, teacher-led” (p. 439). In addition, MacEntee, Burkholder, and Schwab-Cartas (2016) point out its academic value by looking at “... the cellphone as an educational technology that can be used to promote participatory pedagogies in a digital age” (p. 10). Moreover, Schwab-Cartas (2018) delineates the advantage of participatory cellphilmimg:

The cellphilm participatory approach ... departs from other digital technology approaches and apps in that it places an emphasis on participant-led and collective processes of video making, which is itself a form of both learning and documenting personal reflexive and interpretive representations of knowledge (p. 369)

Participatory filmmaking implemented in this study is equivalent to participatory cellphilmimg as such, and lays emphasis on its pedagogical effects.

As part of the study, my third-year seminar students aiming for their undergraduate degree in Kumamoto (11 in total, aged from 20 to 21) and I created a short film together. In the seminar specializing in intercultural communication, we started our film project by exploring various conceptions of culture. This activity generated the following questions, which turned out to be the basis for framing our film: What is the culture that we operate and maintain as participants? What is hidden from us? What does it mean to reveal hidden aspects of culture?

During the first semester (from April to August 2018), the students discussed its unique features of Kumamoto and selected Sōseki Natsume as the theme of the film. The reason for it is evident in what one of the student filmmakers Katy says: “We want to tell you about our hometown Kumamoto. In Kumamoto, a famous Japanese novelist Sōseki Natsume lived and wrote some books. We like him and his works because we can feel the warmth of Kumamoto.” Sōseki, the renowned novelist of the Meiji Era, spent four years living in Kumamoto to teach English. My seminar students read short English works written by Sōseki in his youth, did online searches about his life, and produced a key term related to his life and works respectively (see Table 1). Based on the key term(s), each person made his/her filming plan by storyboarding.

Table 1: *List of Student Filmmakers*

Name in Pseudonym	Gender	Created Key Term(s)
Blackpink	Female	Book, House
BOSS	Male	Pioneer
Gonnie	Female	River
K	Female	Going the Way
Katy	Female	Cat, Pain
Lay	Female	Sea
Marie Antoinette	Male	Genius
Nancy	Female	Nature
Nimo	Male	Outstanding
Orange	Female	Flowers
Owl	Male	Uniqueness

During the summer vacation, the students recorded images representing the key terms by their cellphone. In the second semester (from October 2018 to February 2019), they watched all the recorded images and determined the sequence of scenes. The following images (Figures 1-26) are listed in the order of appearance in the film and suggest how the sketches and key terms are visualized digitally.

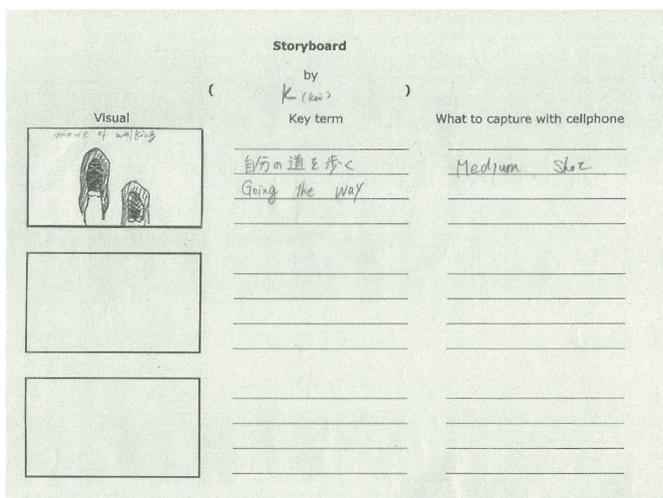


Figure 1. Storyboard by K.

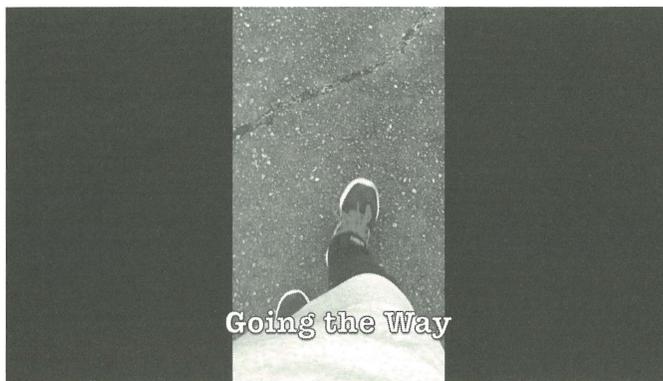


Figure 2. Shot by K.

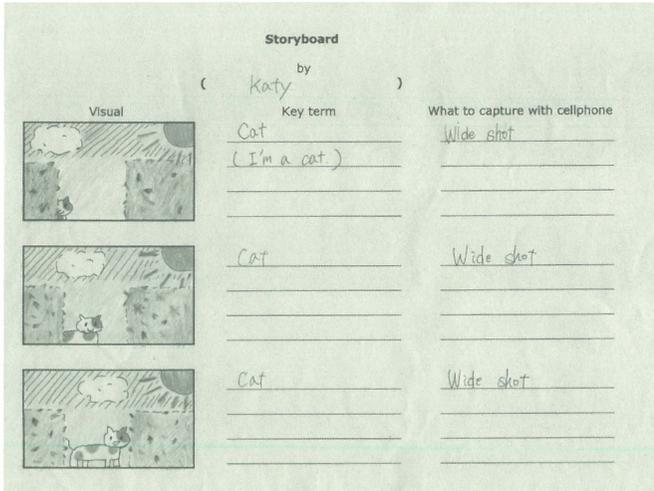


Figure 3. Storyboard (page 1) by Katy.



Figure 4. Shot 1 by Katy.

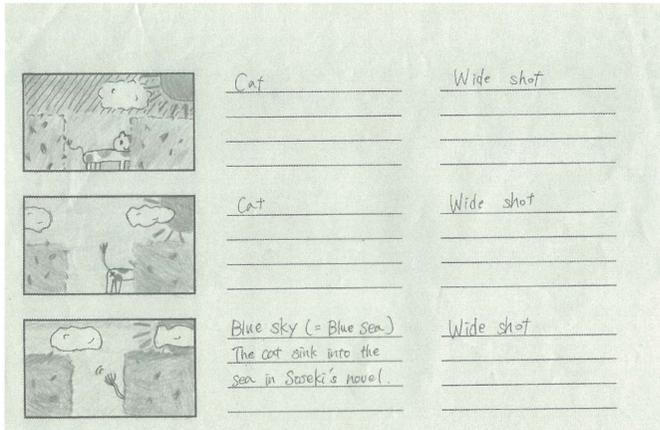


Figure 5. Storyboard (page 2) by Katy.



Figure 6. Shot 2 by Katy.

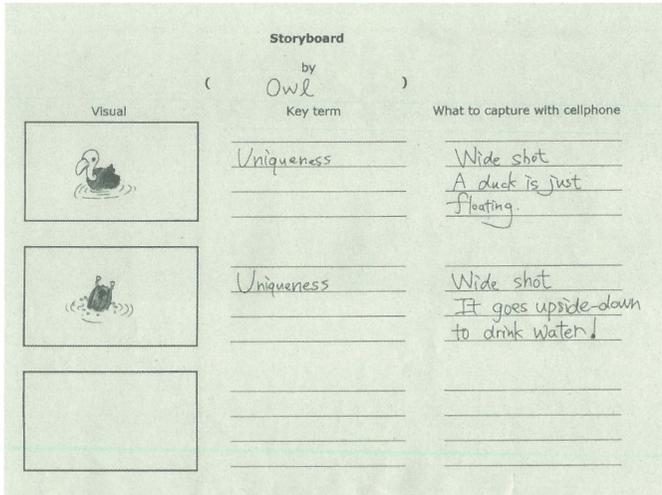


Figure 7. Storyboard by Owl.

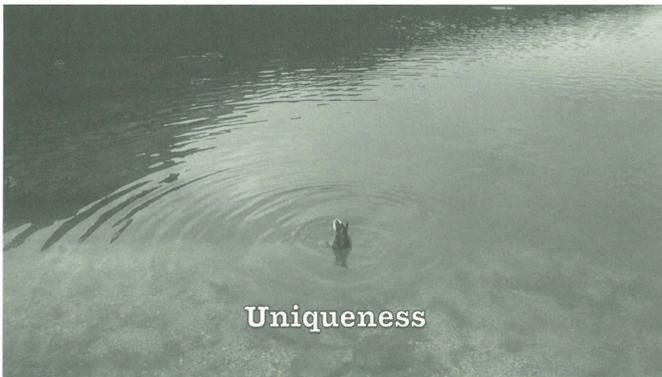


Figure 8. Shot by Owl.

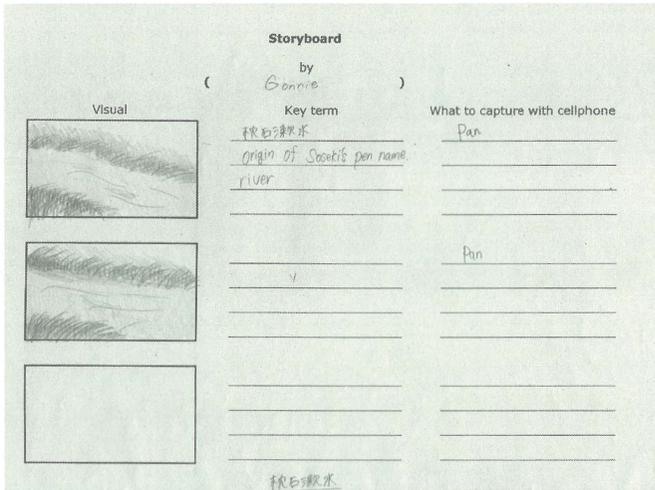


Figure 9. Storyboard by Gonnie.



Figure 10. Shot by Gonnie.

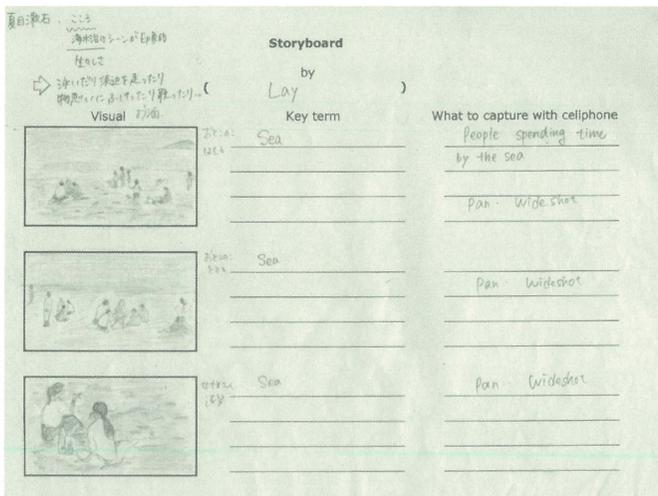


Figure 11. Storyboard by Lay.



Figure 12. Shot by Lay.

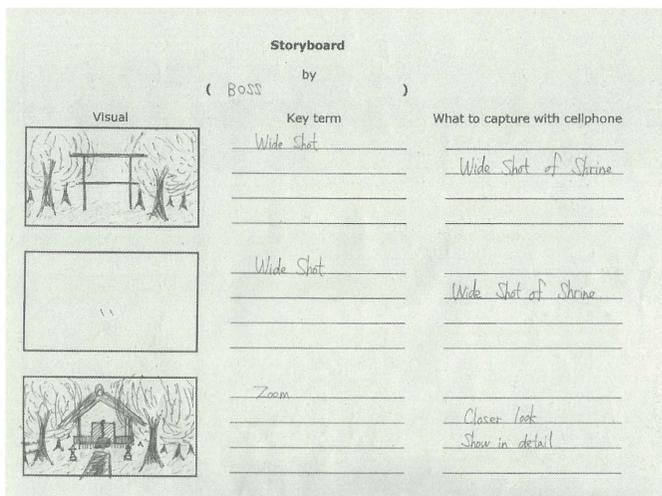


Figure 13. Storyboard by BOSS.

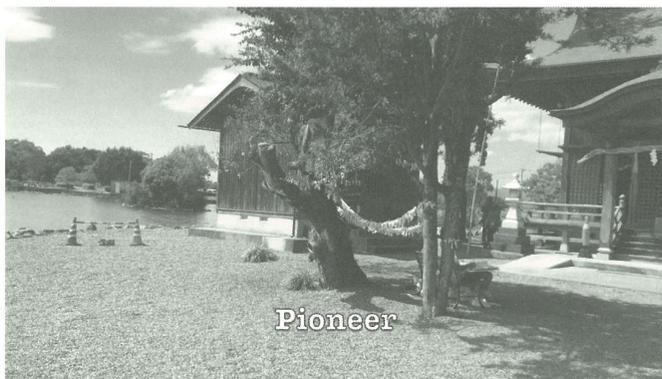


Figure 14. Shot by BOSS.

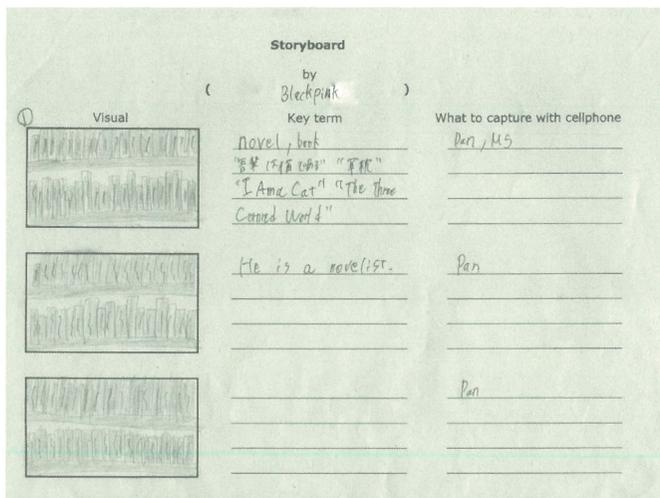


Figure 15. Storyboard (page 1) by Blackpink.

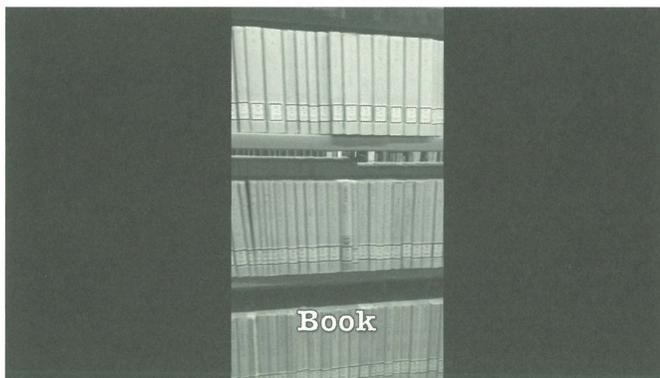


Figure 16. Shot 1 by Blackpink.

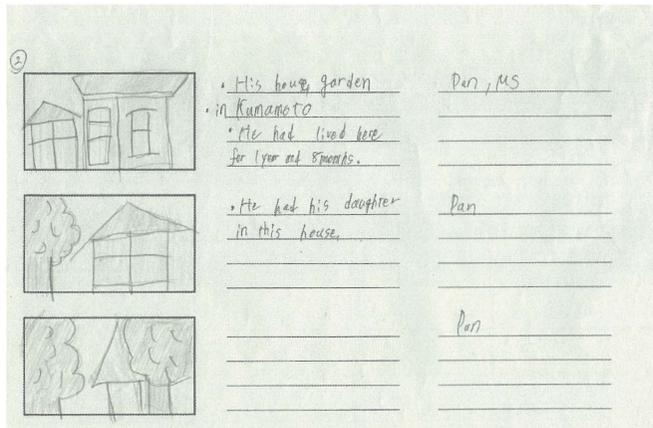


Figure 17. Storyboard (page 2) by Blackpink.

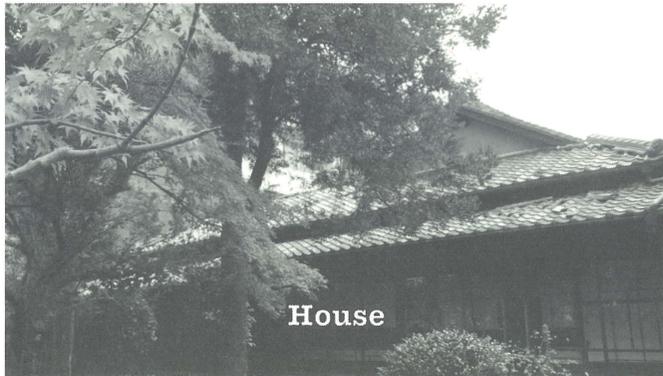


Figure 18. Shot 2 by Blackpink.

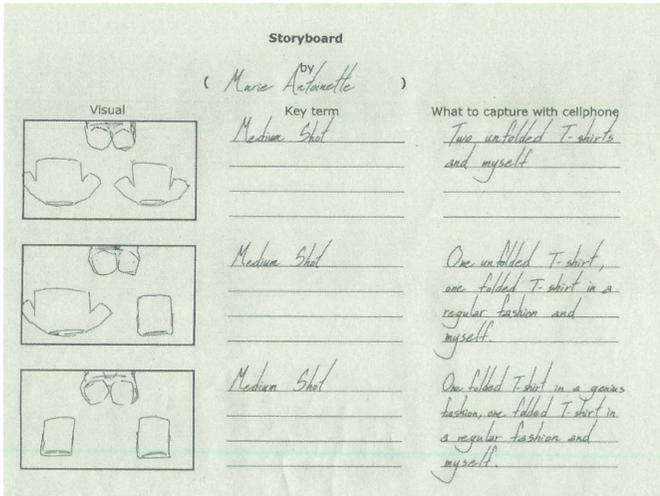


Figure 19. Storyboard by Marie Antoinette.

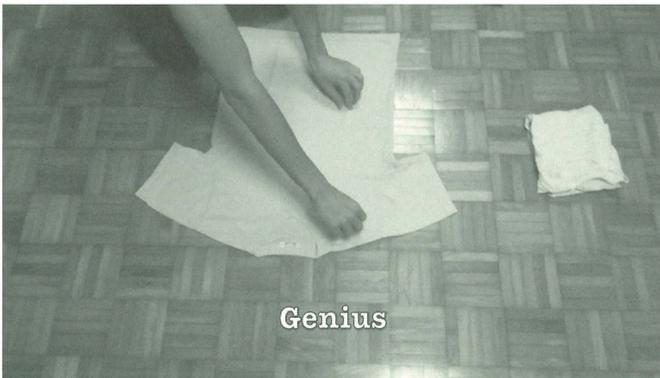


Figure 20. Shot by Marie Antoinette.

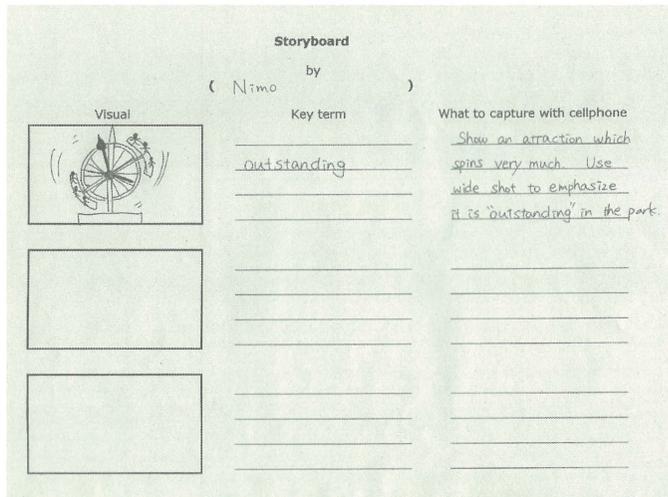


Figure 21. Storyboard by Nimo.

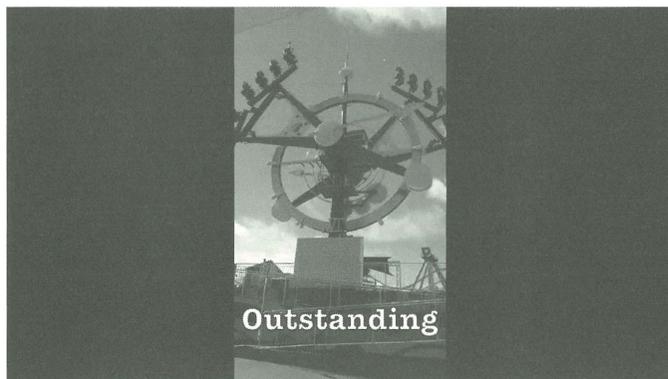


Figure 22. Shot by Nimo.

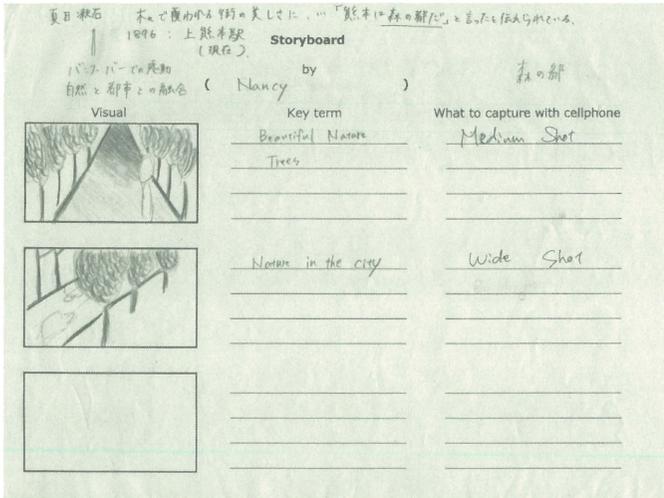


Figure 23. Storyboard by Nancy.

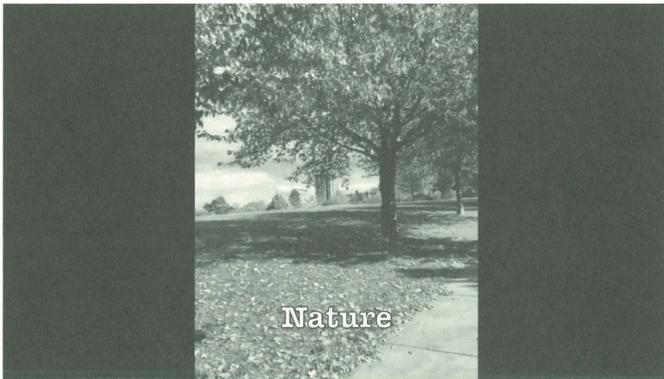


Figure 24. Shot by Nancy.

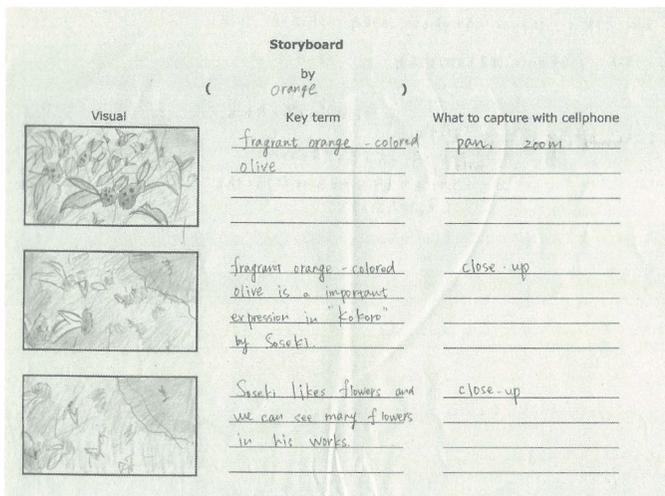


Figure 25. Storyboard by Orange.

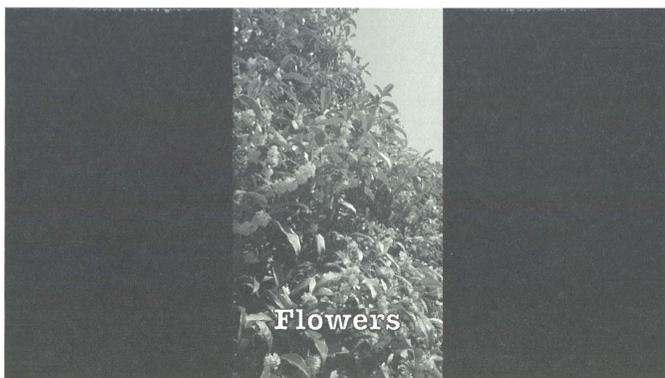


Figure 26. Shot by Orange.

In addition to producing these visual images, the students were engaged in storytelling as narrators; they created and read a series of dialogues in the Kumamoto dialect used by young people in the daily settings. Figure 27 shows the student filmmakers developing the script in the Kumamoto dialect. They also read out the English version in the film. I, the researcher, served as an editor and producer. I put the images in order as requested by using editing software, added their narrating voices

to the movie, synchronized music pieces with the images, and typed end credits. After all these steps were taken, the visual and audio pieces were integrated into one film. The student filmmakers watched the completed film together and discussed possible titles for it. Finally, they reached a consensus to name it *Sōseki in Our Life*.

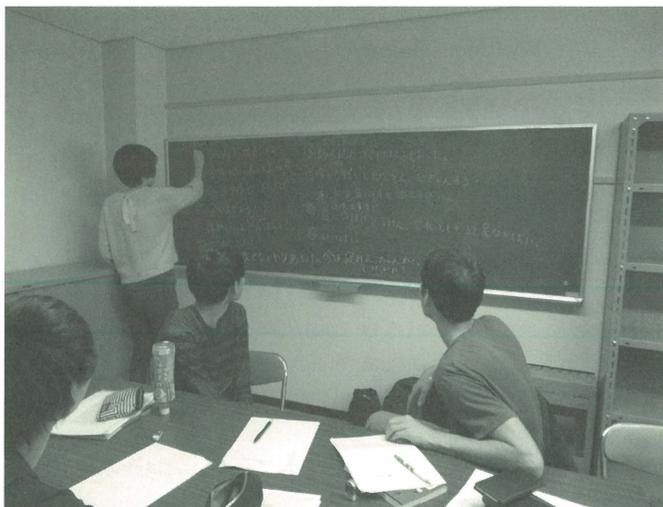


Figure 27. Students working on script writing.

Discussion

As previously explained, *Sōseki in Our Life* is bilingual in English and Japanese, more specifically, the Kumamoto dialect. The produced film is dissimilar to regular documentary films with a narrator providing the single point of view for the audience. In other words, *Sōseki in Our Life* reflects diverse views, as one of the student filmmakers Nimo indicates: “The video was made by many students and a teacher. Each person has his or her message and idea with each video clip. The video is the compilation of all the students and the teacher.” The comments of the student filmmakers below, listed in the order of appearance in the film, reveal the respective intentions underlying each video clip:

K: In my video, I want to tell the viewers that it is important to believe in their intuition, think outside of the box, and do what they want to do without being swayed by those around them.

Katy: Sōseki Natsume was a very thoughtful person, so he was suffering from the pain of living. Thanks to him, we can get ideas about living strongly. This video involves many things related to Sōseki.

Owl: Though birds live a short life, they show some uniqueness while they live. Sōseki Natsume also wrote many unique novels before he passed away.

Gonnie: His pen name Sōseki originates in an ancient Chinese phrase. I want to show the river as the origin of his pseudonym in my video.

Lay: There are scenes of swimming and viewing the sea in Sōseki's *Kokoro*. In my video, there appear people who are bathing in the sea, being alone and lost in thought at the beach, singing, running around, and talking cheerfully with families and friends. All sorts of human vividness find their expression in the sea.

BOSS: In the movie of the Ukishima Shrine, I want to show the concept of "pioneer." This shrine deifies *Izanami* and *Izanagi*. They are said to be the first Gods who married.

Blackpink: Sōseki Natsume is a famous novelist and wrote a lot of novels. He lived in Uchitsuboi for about 2 years, and his daughter was born in this house. He was familiar to Kumamoto. I want to show these elements in my video.

Marie Antoinette: I want to strike the audience by showing ingenious and somewhat comical visual images. The viewers are free to make their own interpretations without feeling the need to respect the director's intentions.

Nimo: As Sōseki Natsume was an outstanding writer who wrote many outstanding works in outstanding ways, I would like to express something outstanding in daily lives. In the video, I show an attraction which, I thought, was the most outstanding.

Nancy: I want the viewers to have the same feeling as Sōseki felt at the Kami-Kumamoto station, when he came here for the first time through my video.

Orange: Fragrant olives appear in *Kokoro* and imply the character's expectation and hope. My video shows flowers can make something attractive.

What becomes clear here is that the students interpreted Sōseki's life and works diversely. The video clips recorded by the students exhibit various voices, and they are interwoven with each other in the film under the theme of "Sōseki." As seen in Marie Antoinette's words above, the produced film invites the audience to share the space together with the student filmmakers and interpret it diversely without imposing a single meaning. In this way, acknowledging the diverse views held by the student filmmakers themselves, *Sōseki in Our Life* promotes multifarious interpretations among the viewers.

While fostering diversity, the film deals with visible and invisible dichotomies within Japan such as center/periphery and standard language/dialect. One of the distinctive features of the film is that the students use the Kumamoto dialect. Pulvers (2006) enunciates the significance of dialects spoken in various regions in Japan:

Many people in Japan lead a double life — linguistically speaking, that is. In their community, they speak the *hogen* (dialect) of their city, town or village, while outside it they may be accustomed to use *hyojungo* (standard Japanese). Their native language, in the true sense of that word, is their dialect, not *hyojungo*. (para. 1)

Taking news broadcasting as an example, Pulvers suggests that dialects are shunned in the public sphere, particularly, in central Tokyo. On the contrary, the students dare to perform daily conversations in the Kumamoto dialect in *Sōseki in Our Life*. A close look at the usage of the dialect in the film reveals what is omitted in the standardized narrative form in the Metropolitan area. In addition, the student filmmakers added the following words to the film: "We will keep speaking the Kumamoto dialect to protect our tongue. Because the Kumamoto dialect is part of our identity." Here it becomes obvious that it plays an important role in the lives of the youth in Kumamo-

to, and relates to their self-affirmation. All these points make it clear that the student filmmakers are now in the third space; they transgress the dichotomy of standard language/dialect by elevating the Kumamoto dialect in the private sphere to the public domain through their active performance in the film.

After the screening of the completed film in January 2019, all of the student filmmakers expressed their satisfaction at the outcome of the collaborative film project. Katy, for example, remarks: “Nobody knew the completed form of our film at first. However, we collected parts of our film from the outside by referring to books and taking movies. Then we made our great film!” In addition, Blackpink mentions: “I didn’t know about Sōseki Natsume well before. However, I researched on him and realized he was a great person. I enjoyed recording movies, making sentences in the Kumamoto dialect, and reading some articles.” Owl also asserts: “We enjoyed working on this project. I think working while enjoying is what makes it successful.” In this way, it is obvious from these comments that they have a liking for each phase of participatory filmmaking.

The film project discussed in this article suggests that participatory filmmaking has an educational advantage. Flicker et al. (2018) delineate it as follows: “Introducing cellfilming into the classroom may also offer students an opportunity to reflect, discuss, and critique contentious issues, while facilitating the generation of many different voices, perspectives and truths ...” (pp. 40-41). Indeed, some of the student filmmakers articulate this point. For instance, self-awareness is elevated through the intentional use of the dialect, as supported by Gonnie’s following statement: “I have never considered Sōseki Natsume carefully before. It was interesting to try to imagine him and make a movie. I’m happy now for completing our seminar movie. And I become interested in the Kumamoto dialect.” Moreover, Nancy even encourages the growth of self-awareness among the viewers in relation to her own learning experience:

With just the theme of “Sōseki Natsume,” I was able to make a lot of discoveries in what I didn’t care about in my everyday life before. I hope the audience will feel that their ordinary lives are full of precious things.

It is thus reasonable to suppose that participatory filmmaking acknowledges and reflects diversity, and furthermore, it offers awareness and learning opportunities.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the practice of participatory filmmaking as a peda-

gogy by focusing on the film created in collaboration with my seminar students in Kumamoto. In doing so, there have emerged the following possibilities of creating a cellphilm in class: 1) giving autonomy to students, 2) proposing diversity, and 3) producing positive changes in learning. First, it has become clear that each student filmmaker has autonomy in deciding what to film with his/her cellphone and what to tell the audience through the recorded video. Second, the film with the diverse points of view interwoven literally and visually shows what diversity looks like in the teaching and learning environment. The case of *Sōseki in Our Life*, in particular, suggests that a cellphilm can present an alternative perspective transgressing the conventional dichotomies. Finally, it has become obvious that the classroom where the educator/researcher and the student filmmakers/learners from various backgrounds gather and interact functions as a site of potential educational change. This is reinforced by the comments of the student filmmakers who point out the enhancement of their self-awareness through the collaborative film project.

At the same time, however, there is an inevitable issue accompanying the practice of participatory cellphilm. That is the audience reception. Ellsworth (1997) demonstrates the incompatibility between what the filmmaker intends to show in his/her work and what the viewers interpret from it. It is valuable to apply her argument to the case of *Sōseki in Our Life*. If the film is screened to people in different locations, the diverse voices represented in the film can be interpreted in much more diverse ways than the student filmmakers expect. Listening to the viewers and their opinions will help them develop and implement the following participatory film project. Furthermore, it may lead to the creation of a cellphilm transforming the relationship between the filmmakers and the audience into the interactive one. For that, the film needs to be distributed widely, and it is indispensable to examine the complex relation between the filmmakers' intentions and the viewers' receptions carefully. Participatory cellphilm is still a novel teaching and learning approach. While acknowledging its possibilities, further research with actual cases is vital for its establishment as a pedagogy promoting diversity.

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